

Time Allocation

Gray) noted that it was because employees contributed toward their indexation since 1970 that he wanted to ensure that none of the amounts set aside by them would fall under the six and five program. In so stating he was indicating that if people had paid for something then it should be delivered. That was the reason for his amendment, to bring into practice the principle he described, that is, to cap only that part of indexing which has not been paid for in advance and in fact is being paid for by the same taxpayers who are being asked to moderate their expectations for a short time. That seems to be an entirely reasonable proposition. I cannot think any fair-minded person could object to it.

The other consideration that I wanted to note during the brief time available is that there has been some discussion by Hon. Members opposite about a contractual obligation. I do not wish to enter into a legal discussion. I would say, however, that there have been changes in the Act in the past on at least two occasions when the fact that it was not really a contract operated to the advantage of public servants. The argument now is that any changes are operating to the disadvantage of retired public servants and public servants generally. The changes in the past have benefited public servants, and on those occasions we did not hear any arguments about contractual obligation.

I have in mind the situation in 1970 when 2 per cent indexing of the Public Service pension plan was introduced. It applied to all those already receiving pensions and had in fact completed their side of the pension agreement by being employees or contributors and who were then, as beneficiaries, receiving the agreed-upon benefits promised while they were employees. The Parliament of that day did not say to these people, "You are not going to be contributors to the index plan, so you will never get the benefits". The Government decided that those pensioners should not be excluded from such an important benefit. On that occasion we certainly did not hear anything about so-called contractual obligations. On the contrary, the changes were welcomed.

The only other point I would make is to recall that, prior to the 1979 election, in the Standing Committee for Miscellaneous Estimates, I believe that there was all-Party agreement for the capping of Public Service indexing over a certain amount. I do not have the details, but I believe that that all-Party agreement fell victim, as it were, to the 1979 election and was not proceeded with.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): It was quite a different concept.

Mr. MacLaren: It may have been in many respects a different concept, but the basic principle which that agreement embodied was not, in essence, different from that which we have before us today. Capping of indexing in certain circumstances may well be appropriate. Certainly in my view it is appropriate in our present economic condition which requires a degree of commitment and restraint on the part of all Canadians. I am sure that those who are receiving Public Service pensions will recognize the reasonableness of that proposition.

I recall the Hon. Member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mr. Waddell) saying the other evening that, "in other words, the war against inflation will be fought in part by the retired public servants of Canada". That is true. I certainly would be the last to suggest that they would think of playing any other role.

Mr. John Bosley (Don Valley West): Mr. Speaker, it is never a pleasure to participate in a closure debate or a motion to close debate, so the traditional introduction to a Parliamentary speech I will not make, with great respect.

I wish to respond directly to some of the comments of the Hon. Member for Etobicoke North (Mr. MacLaren), whose arguments as always sound good but contain within them most remarkable assertions. The Hon. Member's argument was that because a Bill only has two clauses, it does not need as much debate as a Bill with more clauses. The logical conclusion of that argument would be that it would be reasonable for the House to deal with a Bill that has one clause, a clause to abolish Parliament, in one day because it only had one clause. It is a most remarkable assertion that the necessity of debate and the quality and length of debate should be determined by the number of clauses in a Bill. We might refer to that as a typical quantitative argument from people who quantify things rather than deal with the ethics of things.

It is true that this Bill has had a substantial number of speakers. Surely any Bill with the purpose and intent to take away a right, when there is not agreement by both parties, should deserve to have every Member of the House speak on the matter. That seems to be self-evident. As long as I have breath I will refute, every time I hear it, the argument that someone in the House has the capacity to rise and invoke closure on this basis because "somebody else has the capacity to decide that everything there is to say has now been said". That is the most fundamental muzzling of free speech that I have ever heard. I am absolutely shocked that the Hon. Member opposite would support it, because I know his track record on these issues.

Let me deal briefly with the contractual obligations which were so gleefully and happily thrown out by the previous Member as existing in this case. His argument was that obviously no contractual obligation exists because in a previous case the contract was amended and they did not object. If I can paraphrase the Hon. Member correctly, in a previous case the benefit was increased and there was no objection; it was therefore not a contract. In fact, what happened in that case is that the two parties to the agreement agreed. What we have here is a clear case where one party to the agreement with the ability to invoke closure in the House of Commons chooses unilaterally to change a contractual agreement without consultation, without agreement. Perhaps the lunacy of the argument of the Government is best indicated by the fact that the Government felt it was necessary, having lauded six and five all across the country, to bring in a motion to amend the 6 per cent and 5 per cent in this case to 6.5 per cent and 5.5 per cent because, said the Minister as correctly quoted by the